

Strategic Goal 2: Provide Recreation for America

America has turned to its public lands for respite and inspiration since 1872, when Congress designated Yellowstone as the Nation's first "pleasuring ground" for the benefit and enjoyment of the people.

Americans today come to their national parks, refuges, and public lands for many reasons: to renew their sense of self, to experience adventure and relaxation, and to sample the rich diversity of our landscape and culture on water or land, at sea level or thousands of feet above, in scuba gear, on mountain bikes or with a camera, while hunting, fishing, camping, hiking, boating, white water rafting, and birding.

Providing those recreational opportunities, consistent with other land uses and our stewardship responsibility, is Interior's second strategic goal. We are committed to providing access to Federal lands and enhancing opportunities for everyone to enjoy the benefits of our Nation's heritage. We want our visitors to leave satisfied and re-energized by their recreation experience, and we want them to come back in the future. We also want their visit to be safe.

Interior's National Park Service (NPS) manages Yellowstone, one of 56 National Parks in the 388-unit park system. Along with National Parks, America's public lands offer recreational opportunities at 90 national monument locations, 161 wilderness areas, 542 National Wildlife Refuges, 70 National Fish Hatcheries, and scores of other recreation sites managed by Interior's Bureau of Land Management (BLM), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), and Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation).

Interior's recreation destinations are among the Nation's most popular. Annually, the National Park System draws over 277 million visits. Our 93-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System sees another 39 million visits, and National Fish Hatcheries log 2 million visits. The 262 million acres of public lands managed by our Bureau of Land Management receive 68 million visits, while the Bureau of Reclamation estimates 90 million visits annually to its 308 recreation sites.

Performance Results

The Department of the Interior measures its performance in providing recreation for America against two standards: did we provide a quality experience to our visitors, and was their visit a safe one? Our performance assessment starts with listening to our customers; we ask visitors about their recreational experiences and the quality of the facilities we provide.

The NPS was the first bureau to use surveys to capture visitor feedback. Since 1988, the Visitor Services Project (VSP) has conducted over 140 in-depth visitor studies in more than 100 units of the National Park system. Through these customized studies, park managers obtain accurate information about visitors—who they are, what they do, their needs and opinions. Managers then use what they learn to improve services.

A customer satisfaction card has also been used for the past five years to survey visitors to over 300 units of the 388-unit National Park System (Figure 12). The card will continue to be used annually by NPS units to measure performance related to visitor satisfaction, and for insights regarding the effectiveness of NPS interpretive and educational efforts.

In FY 2003, the NPS released its ninth annual report summarizing visitor feedback. The report, available online at <http://www.nps.gov/socialscience/waso/products.htm>, summarizes how visitors feel about selected services in the parks. The report serves as the NPS annual “report card.” The NPS estimates that it will achieve its annual target of satisfying 95 percent of park visitors, and that an estimated 74 percent of visitors are satisfied with commercial services offered within the parks, such as concessions and lodging facilities, meeting the annual target. The NPS further estimates that 84 percent of visitors responded that they understood and appreciated the significance of the park they were visiting, meeting the NPS annual target.

Other recreation-providing bureaus within Interior are also talking with those we serve to find out how we can improve. The BLM obtained data

FIGURE 12

Visitor Satisfaction with Park Services

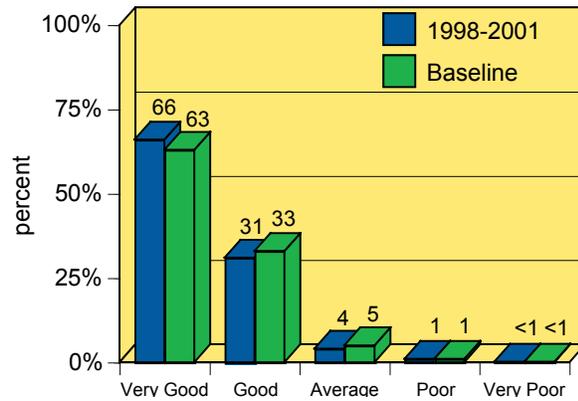


TABLE 3

DOI Volunteer Programs						
Agency	Hours Donated (thousands)			Value of Volunteer Time (millions)		
	2003	2004*	2005*	2003	2004*	2005*
FWS	1,676	1,758	1,840	\$18.6	\$19.7	\$20.9
NPS	4,700*	5,900	6,100	77.7	100.3	106.7
BLM	535	540	545	8.6	8.7	8.8
TOTAL	6,911	8,198	8,485	\$104.9	\$128.7	\$136.4

* Projected amounts

that revealed 97 percent of visitors to its lands were satisfied with the quality of their experiences, against a target of 93 percent. The FWS exceeded its long-term goal for visitor satisfaction in its baseline survey of National Wildlife Refuges conducted in FY 2003. The FWS survey offered findings that FWS managers are examining as opportunities for improvement. (See sidebar regarding the FWS Refuge survey.)

Interior’s mission includes both serving visitors and protecting the resources that visitors come to enjoy. This combined mission cannot be accomplished alone. Interior bureaus continue to build sustainable partnerships with volunteers, corporations, foundations and others who seek to preserve some of America’s greatest natural treasures.

Volunteers and partners are the heart and soul of public land preservation efforts (Table 3). In FY 2003, more than 200,000 volunteers provided 6.9 million hours of time valued at about \$104.9 million to Interior bureaus. These volunteers provided

services ranging from office work to maintaining campgrounds. The NPS received an estimated 4.7 million hours of volunteer time, against a target of 4.6 million hours. The FWS received 1.6 million hours from volunteers, exceeding the target of 1.3 million hours.

Friends Groups and partners also provide valuable time and service. In FY 2003, the NPS estimates, based upon partial data, that it worked with partners to conserve an additional 9,140 miles of trails, 5,050 miles of river corridors, and 846,282 acres of parks and open spaces, against targets of 8,450 miles of trails, 4,600 miles of protected river corridor, and 846,200 acres of park and open spaces above 1997 totals. The FWS saw the creation of 20 new Friends Groups, exceeding the target of 19, that worked closely with FWS staff to assist fish hatcheries and refuges.

Looking Forward

Coping with growing popularity and new population pressures in a context of constrained resources strains the Department's ability to fulfill its recreation mandate. Our magnificent natural resources are no longer remote sanctuaries. They face significant use and threats from some invasive plants and animals. Their infrastructure is aging and stressed by increasing visitor use and years of inadequate maintenance.

Rebuilding that infrastructure remains a high priority for the Department and for the administration of President Bush.

Asking What Our Customers Think

The National Park Service and the Bureau of Land Management have run visitor site surveys for years. They ask their customers to evaluate the recreation experience they provided and then use the answers to set policies and priorities. But 2003 marked the first year that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) commissioned an extensive on-site visitor survey.

Based on more than 3,000 visitor satisfaction surveys, the report compiled information from 43 refuges, each with an environmental education program, a visitor center, and annual visitation of at least 75,000.

Visitor satisfaction was high, the survey said. More than 90 percent of customers were "satisfied" or "very satisfied," and said they would probably visit a refuge again within the next two years. Visitor satisfaction was durable, too. Even visitors dissatisfied with some element of service or facilities were likely to express overall satisfaction with their visit.

Most visitors initially learned about refuge recreation opportunities through word of mouth, the survey noted, suggesting that the Refuge System could benefit by extending its outreach efforts to broader demographic groups.

"That's one of the survey issues we have already begun addressing," FWS Director Steve Williams said.

The report also helped the National Wildlife Refuge System analyze aspects of its fee demonstration program. Most refuges are open to the public at no cost, but a small percentage charges a nominal entrance fee, and some sites charge for special activities and additional services.

Survey results found that an outstanding majority of visitors, 94 percent, did not mind paying the fee. In fact, statistical analysis showed that the fee did not restrict visitation. Nearly 90 percent of visitors felt strongly that the refuge provided them with an excellent value.

Researchers found that knowledgeable and courteous employees were the most important factors when people gave high marks to refuges for the overall quality of the recreation/educational experience. Maps, signs, and printed information also played an important role. Most often, refuges that got the highest marks for overall visitor satisfaction also got high marks for their conservation efforts, law enforcement presence, road and parking lot maintenance, and the ease with which visitors could make an inquiry or complaint.



The increasing popularity of public lands complicates our management task. Through the Recreation Fee Demonstration Program, Interior continues to explore ways to provide seamless service to visitors of our recreation sites while providing a framework for a sensible, efficient, and coherent fee program. For example, in FY 2003, the BLM continued to participate in the Recreational Fee

Demonstration Program, under which public land visitors are charged a fee to use many of BLM's campgrounds, day-use areas, and other developed recreation sites. All of the money collected is reinvested at the site of collection to improve its physical infrastructure and enhance customer satisfaction, directly benefiting those who pay for and use the site. In 2003, both fee collections and overall recreation use increased at BLM sites.

Our recreation mission needs to coexist with other legitimate uses of public lands, such as producing forage, forest products, water, power, and other commodities needed to meet America's needs. That coexistence is not always easy to manage. At the same time, the Department must manage increasing levels of competition among different recreation users of the same resource: off-roaders versus wildlife photographers in the same area, for example, or pedestrians conflicting with equestrians over a crowded mountain trail.

Success will depend on communication and cooperation among all recreation users. The Department will work to speed the adoption of bureau best practices among all Departmental recreation providers, and to expand our working partnerships with states, Tribes, and local governments, along with non-profit groups, concerned citizens, and our growing numbers of volunteers.

Performance and Costs at a Glance

Tables 4 and 5 summarize FY 2003 performance and cost data for Strategic Goal 2.

Teaching Ethics for the Outdoors

The idea behind Leave No Trace!, an innovative public/private sector educational partnership, is simple: the best way to minimize visitor impacts to America's wilderness, refuge, and park lands is to teach those visitors the ethics of the outdoors.



Leave No Trace! practices are techniques that visitors can use to help reduce evidence of their presence in the back country. The ethic is easy to understand: make it hard for others to see or hear you and Leave No Trace! of your visit. If visitors know how to minimize their impact on natural resources, wildlife, and other users, they can enjoy back country and wilderness areas while preserving the beauty and solitude of these areas.

Launched in 1994, Leave No Trace! is a not-for-profit organization designed to promote land stewardship, minimum-impact skills, and wilderness ethics through education, research, and partnerships. The program is managed by LNT Inc., a non-profit organization located in Boulder, Colorado, which oversees memberships, marketing, fundraising, and program development.

Active support is broad and deep. Leave No Trace! is the only program of its kind that has been universally adopted, administered, and used in a unified, joint effort by the Bureau of Land Management, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Forest Service, the National Park Service, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Whenever possible, its tenets are taught by this interagency group with no differentiation between agencies or private partners.

The human-powered outdoor recreation industry has adopted Leave No Trace! enthusiastically, too, with over 300 manufacturers and retailers joining with the Federal agencies to bring the message to the American public. Recreation users likewise have embraced Leave No Trace! across the spectrum, from wilderness to off-highway vehicle enthusiasts.

This year the partnership updated several of its skills and ethics booklets to include the latest scientific research on varied environments across the country. Special emphasis in FY 2003 was on a "Group Use" pamphlet, Western River Corridor Use, and the "Frontcountry Use" program for urban and suburban environments. Leave No Trace! teams were active teachers in the field, too, bringing the message this year to the National Trails Conference, Outdoor Writers of America Association Conference, Outdoor Retailer Show, Rocky Mountain Elk Expo, National Philmont Boy Scout Camp, and Western Region Boy Scout "Camp School".

Interior incurred costs of about \$2.17 billion for Strategic Goal 2, a small decrease of about 1% compared to FY 2002. The Department established 32 performance measures for Strategic Goal 2. Of the 32 performance measures, the Department achieved or exceeded the goals for 28 measures (88%). This is an increase of 36% over FY 2002. Interior did not meet the goal for 4 performance measures (12%).

One GPRA Program Activity, "Provide for Public Enjoyment and Visitor Experience of Parks",

incurred \$1.5 billion or 69% of Strategic Goal 2 costs. The resources devoted to this GPRA program activity were about 6% less than those provided in FY 2002. Of the four performance measures related to this GPRA program activity in FY 2003, results show that 75% of the measures were met or exceeded, an increase over the 50% achieved in FY 2002, a comparable increase in performance. The other

measures were not achieved because of factors such as States being unable to participate in training sessions due to budget restrictions, an inability to resolve audit issues with States, and performance related to accident/incidents on Federal land.

More detailed information concerning performance results is available in Part 3, Performance Section.

TABLE 4

Strategic Goal 2 FY 2003 Performance Measure Scorecard						
GPRA Program Activity	Number of Measures	Exceeded Goal	Met Goal	Did Not Meet Goal	No Report	Percent Exceeding or Meeting Goal
Responsible Recreation	4	2	2	0	0	100%
Land Management and Development	3	2	0	1	0	67%
Greater Public Use on Service (FWS) Lands	3	1	2	0	0	100%
Partnerships in Natural Resources	9	5	2	2	0	78%
Provide for Public Enjoyment and Visitor Experience of Parks	4	0	3	1	0	75%
Enhance Recreational Opportunities Managed by Others	4	3	1	0	0	100%
Ensure Organizational Effectiveness	5	0	5	0	0	100%
TOTAL	32	13	15	4	0	88%

TABLE 5

Strategic Goal 2 Costs (in millions)		
GPRA Program Activity	FY 2003	FY 2002
Responsible Recreation	\$100	\$94
Land Management and Development	34	36
Greater Public Use on Service (FWS) Lands	185	175
Partnerships in Natural Resources	-	-
Provide for Public Enjoyment and Visitor Experience of Parks	1,497	1,600
Enhance Recreational Opportunities Managed by Others	352	288
Ensure Organizational Effectiveness	*	*
Total Gross Cost Prior to Eliminations	2,168	2,193
Less: Elimination of Intra-Department Activity	(23)	(12)
Total Gross Cost After Eliminations	\$2,145	\$2,181

* Costs not separately identified for this GPRA Program Activity

